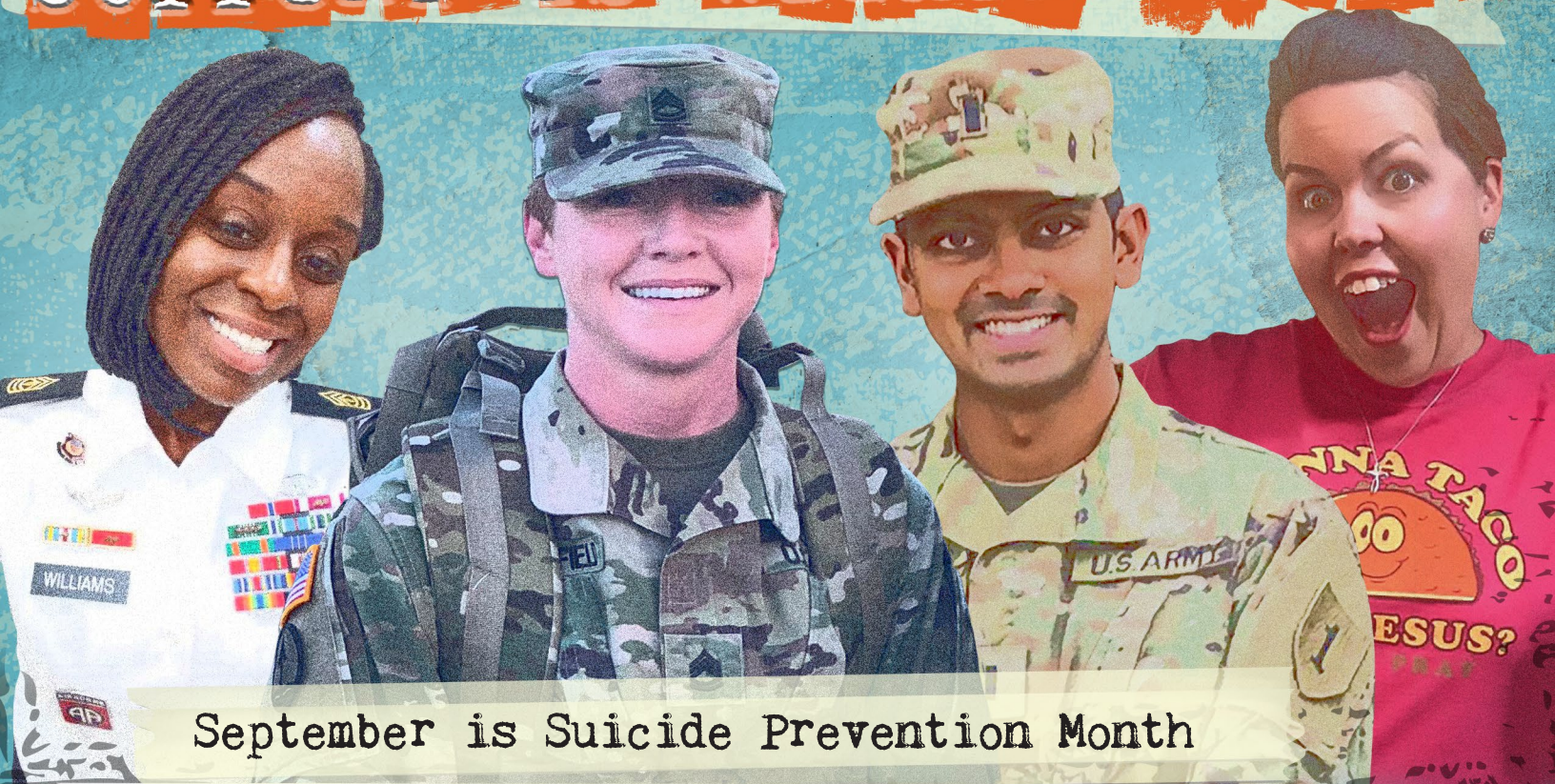


CONNECT TO PROTECT

SUPPORT IS WITHIN REACH



September is Suicide Prevention Month

It's the Little Things that Matter...

In support of the Suicide Prevention Month theme of connectedness, the Army is focusing on "It's the Little Things that Matter," emphasizing the everyday interactions that build strong relationships which act as a protective factor against suicide.

Those little moments of connection with our close circle and those around us have a big impact on how we think, feel, and thrive. A simple phone call to ask how someone is doing, a lunch or dinner date to catch up, an invitation for a quick hike or a small gathering with friends, a card or sharing a favorite dessert. It doesn't take much to let someone know you're thinking about them and that you care. Being intentional about connecting with, and reaching out to, Family, Soldiers and Peers every day, builds the support network we can lean on when we find ourselves struggling.

Connect to Protect: Support is Within Reach, the 2021 DOD slogan for SPM, emphasizes connections with others and the community, as well as with suicide prevention resources. In this special edition ARD zine, Soldiers and spouses share their mental health struggles, when they finally reached out for support, and how sometimes the smallest acts by those around them changed the course of their lives.



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1SG GRACIE JP WILLIAMS

1SG Gracie Williams has served in the Army for 21 years. She did three combat tours and has been recognized repeatedly for her work and exceptional leadership. Her mental health struggles were compounded by triggers from early childhood abuse, predatory behavior in her unit, marital issues, PTSD, and being verbally reprimanded by leadership when her work performance suffered. She died during a suicide attempt and was revived. After surviving, the outpouring of love and support from her Army Family and friends set her on the path to healing and redemption. Her advice to leaders: "Your words matter."

As a young Sergeant, my Sergeant Major checked in and on me constantly. She would consistently say: 'You matter. You belong here. We need you. We are going to get through this together.'

Scan the QR code to read 1SG Williams's full story.



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"Seeing my teammates from years ago...makes me happy."

Not always

It is not always that person who starts to withdraw. ...give away their valuable items...face adversity through a divorce...Sometimes, it's those we always turn to for advice...

...who provide comic relief... the sounding board for everyone they meet.

While we have those who give us our sense of purpose, they may have secretly lost their own; these are the ones who go without notice. First to work, last to leave...

Those are who I worry about. The hardest step is asking, but it is the first step to mental freedom.

By Chelsea Porterfield



SFC' CHELSEA PORTERFIELD

Sgt. 1st Class Chelsea Porterfield has spent 19 years in the Army and has four deployments including the initial push into Iraq. A military policewoman by trade, she is currently the Sergeant of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It was at Fort Myer, Virginia, back in 2018 when she found herself crying uncontrollably at her desk and making a plan to die by suicide. "I didn't know what was happening to me that morning," she said. She drove herself to Rader Clinic and when she found it was closed made the drive to the Fort Belvoir emergency room. She couldn't talk so she gave them a note and was checked into impatient treatment. She grew up with an old-school Army mindset about mental health and felt guilt and shame seeking help. After four deployments she didn't understand why she was having thoughts of suicide now. In retrospect she said she threw herself into work as a distraction from the things in life she was dealing with.

"People don't ever think of the strong ones who are actually the weakest mentally. They are the ones who are tired, they are the ones who are run down, the ones who don't have a pillar of support," she said. She advises people to check in on the "beacons of strength," the hard charging Soldiers at work early and late, who are always taking care of others. "When someone is giving you their water all the time and you are not replenishing that water, they are going to run out," she said. She recalls a colleague whom she often listened to telling her during a conversation: "You know, I really appreciate you." "Just hearing that you are appreciated...knowing that that person means it (makes a difference)," Porterfield said.



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After ROTC, CPT Adel Hussain was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, in 2017 and immediately went to a 9-month stint in Europe in support of Atlantic Resolve.

He recalls being in Germany and feeling a mix of happiness and anger. He liked being in Europe but as a brand-new lieutenant he felt "crushed" by the leadership environment in his unit. Things got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. By that time, he was working as an XO in a basic training unit at Fort Sill.

"I would just get angry over something very stupid...a product I sent up to higher getting kicked back for corrections...I would just get so emotionally upset over little, small things like that." He also noticed it would take him over two hours to get going in the mornings on weekends, and sometimes when getting ready for work he would put on one boot, and it would take him 30 minutes to put on the other boot. He also had constant negative, angry thoughts about everything throughout his day as well as criticizing himself for every little perceived failure.

Then he caught COVID-19 and was in quarantine at home. "I didn't do anything, I didn't eat, I didn't do activities, I just sat in bed for four days and stared at the ceiling...That's when I realized 'I need to get help.'" There was a stigma

getting help at his first unit, but at his second unit the climate made him feel completely safe getting help. "During the COVID-19 pandemic most people were going through some mental anguish...so there was a very implicit acknowledgement that...a lot of us were going through mental health issues," he said. "I now view mental health more as a physical injury. I might have pain in my knee, that doesn't mean I need to have knee surgery, but there is not going to be an issue if I go to the doctor and say, 'hey doc, can you take a look at my knee?' If I feel blue enough...I either go see an MFLAC or go to behavioral health...it's PMCs for the mind."

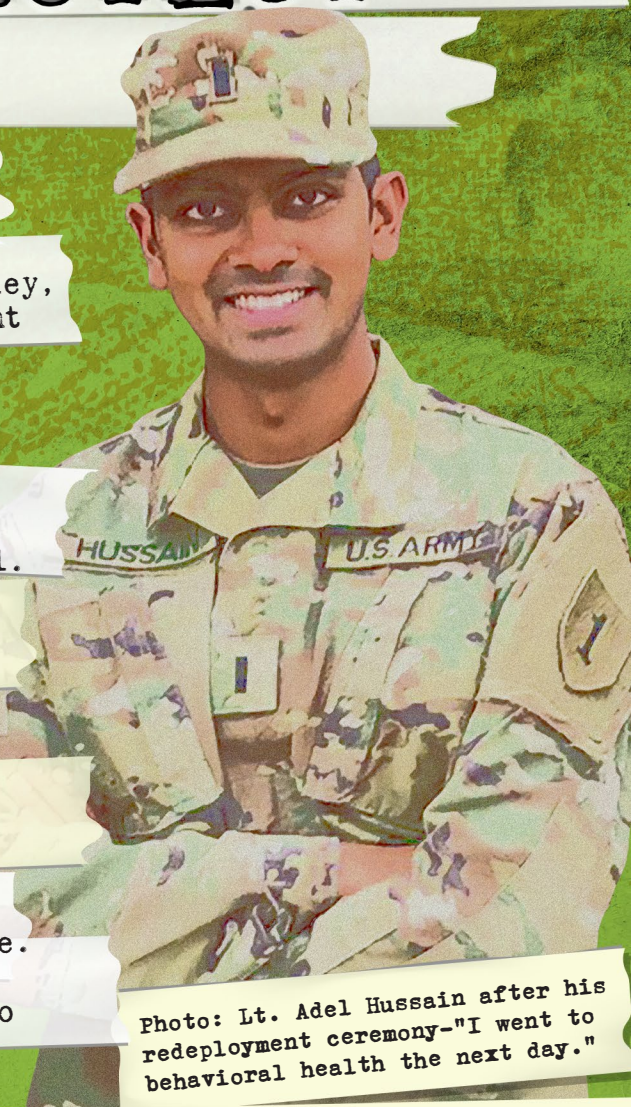


Photo: Lt. Adel Hussain after his redeployment ceremony—"I went to behavioral health the next day."

CPT ADEL HUSSAIN

"For the last five years I had never celebrated a birthday... one of my coworkers found out it was my birthday...and threw me a birthday party and (made) a cake for me...It was really the first time in a long time... that I felt valued and loved by people."



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CONNECT TO PROTECT

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Sharita Knobloch has been an Army wife for over a decade. The mother of two and her infantryman husband have been stationed across the country from Dahlgren, Georgia, to JBLM, Washington, and currently Fort Bliss, Texas. Through her husband's training exercises, rotations away from home, drill sergeant assignment, and unpredictable schedule, she's always approached taking care of the Homefront with what she calls an Army spouse attitude of "suck it up buttercup," despite struggling with anxiety and depression. Until one day she found it hard to function. Her son was 5 months old, recovering from bronchitis. She was terrified he would stop breathing and so spent her time thinking of worst-case scenarios. After putting her son to bed one night, she went downstairs to talk to her husband and started crying. "I remember standing over his recliner, trying to catch my breath, sobbing, having my first-ever panic attack and just being like 'I can't do this, I can't do this...What do I do? What do I do? What do I do?'" Her husband supported her in getting help, and when she took her son to his appointment the next day, she talked to her family practitioner then made an appointment for herself. She said that some Army spouses are not comfortable asking for help probably because they feel they "should be" strong, they don't want to feel like they "failed" at being an Army spouse, they fear negatively affecting their spouse's career, or they are isolated from their support network. Knobloch said a fellow Army spouse helped her by simply reassuring her, saying "You are doing a good job, you are capable, and you are a strong person." Now, Knobloch has built a support network for other Army spouses through the organization Army Wife Network. After seeing a counselor and starting medication, Knobloch said she saw a marked difference within days. "I still have moments when it flares, but I've learned to pay attention to my body and emotions. I've continued working with a counselor and I'm still on my medication, I'm so thankful for it," she said.



SHARITA KNOBLOCH, ARMY SPOUSE



"(My son's doctor) looked over at me and said the magic question: 'So how are you doing?' and I lost it... 'I'm overwhelmed, I can't do this, I'm so stressed, I'm so angry...' And he didn't say 'you'll get through this,' or 'you should be stronger...' He was like 'OK, that makes a lot of sense. I see a lot of military spouses that struggle with this, let's get you taken care of.'"

I ❤️ MY FAMILY



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RESOURCES

Military Crisis Line

**Military
Crisis Line**



A free, confidential resource for Veterans, active duty, Reserve, and National Guard Soldiers, and Family members

Phone: 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1) or Text: 838255

Calling from overseas:

- In Europe: Call 00800 1273 8255 or DSN 118
- In Korea: Call 0808 555 118 or DSN 118
- In Afghanistan: Call 00 1 800 273 8255 or DSN 111

Chat: www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat

Web: www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/military-crisis-line

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to people in a suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call is routed to the nearest crisis center in the national network of 150+ crisis centers and is available 24/7.

Phone: 1-800-273-TALK (8255); TTY: 800-799-4889 / Web: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Military OneSource

For non-medical counseling, Military OneSource provides 24/7 service to all Service members, active duty, Reserve, and National Guard Soldiers and eligible Family members.

Phone: 800-342-9647 / Chat: livechat.militaryonesourceconnect.org/chat

Web: www.militaryonesource.mil

App: My Military OneSource (Available [Google Play](#) and [Apple App Store](#))

inTransition

A free, confidential program that offers specialized coaching and assistance for active duty, Reserve, and National Guard Soldiers, Veterans, and retirees who need access to mental health care when PCSing, returning from deployment, transitioning between the active duty or reserve component, transitioning to civilian life or any time they need a new mental health provider or need a provider for the first time.

Phone: 1-800-424-7877

Outside the United States (international toll-free number): 800-424-4685

Outside the United States (collect): 314-387-4700

Web: www.health.mil/inTransition

The Army Suicide Prevention Program (SP2)

SP2 educates and trains active duty, Reserve, and National Guard Soldiers, Army Civilians and Family members on suicide prevention and postvention actions to minimize the risk for suicide. SP2 improves the readiness of the Army through the development and enhancement of SP2 policies, training, data collection and analysis, and strategic communications designed to prevent suicide; thereby preserving mission effectiveness through individual readiness and resilience for Soldiers, Army Civilians and Family members.

Web: <https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/suicide-prevention/index.html>

Safe Helpline

DoD Safe Helpline provides secure, confidential, and anonymous crisis support for members if the DOD community affected by sexual assault.

Online: Access one-on-one, anonymous, and secure support through Safe Helpline's secure online chat portal: <https://safehelpline.org/online>

Telephone: Call 877-995-5247. The phone number is the same in the U.S. and worldwide via DSN.

Safe Helpline App: Access a self-care plan and self-care exercises as well as the other Safe Helpline services with an easy-to-use mobile app: <https://safehelpline.org/app>



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